

GURDWARAS IN PAKISTAN

REQUEST TO GOVERNMENT OF PAKISTAN TO STOP GIVING RENOVATION WORK IN PAKISTAN GURDWARAS TO SGPC/ DSGMC

Government of Pakistan,

Gurdwara Waqf Board, Pakistan.

Honorable officials,

We would like to bring to your attention the large scale erosion of historical artifacts, architecture, and heritage associated with Sikhs. This has been happening in Punjab and other places in India since many decades now. Sikhs have lost the originality that their heritage and architecture once possessed.

SGPC (Shromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee), Amritsar Sahib is the instrumental and apex body running affairs of the Sikh community. DSGMC (Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee) is another important Sikh body managing similar Sikh affairs in the city of Delhi. These bodies do not attend to the concerns of the larger community and make decisions on their own in a non-collaborative way. To make matters worse, they do not communicate with grassroots Sikhs for most concerns that the community has or may have. This has been validated by many people from time to time.

In the last about 50 years, SGPC has demolished, destroyed, altered and faded away the original look of Sikh historical Gurdwaras in India. All this has been done in the name of "Modernization", "Renovation" and "upkeep". Under these concepts and cover, Sikhs have lost a large percentage of their heritage. "Kar Sewa" groups have originated and they too are generally insensitive to the historic aspects of any building or structure. In India, we believe that Kar Sewa groups are given financial contracts to renovate Gurdwaras. Neither is the Sikh community involved, nor are they informed, leave aside consult. In most advanced countries, there are public hearings on re-zoning, renovation issues etc. Here in Punjab, India, there is nothing of that sort. Hundreds and hundreds of Sikh Gurdwaras have been affected this way and Sikh architectural heritage has been eroded that way.

Documentation about these acts of SGPC / DSGMC with original pictures in many instances are available within the wider Sikh circles and organizations doing work on protection of Sikh heritage, atleast in the sense of narrative work and outlines. Hundreds of Sikh shrines, Gurdwaras, Sikh forts, historical buildings and related have been either altered and changed or many have been demolished. We are ready to provide the list of such places with related documentations. Many Gurdwaras or their vicinities are being commercialized in Punjab by many vested interests/ special interest groups and SGPC. This includes introduction of un-Sikh or anti-Sikh practices as well in such projects.

The Sikhs, for a long time have believed that the Gurdwaras in Pakistan are safe in this regard and sense. Much of our heritage left in Pakistan after the partition in 1947, was generally considered as safe and in it's original glory. Sikhs have believed this generally speaking and feel comfortable about it.

Lately, however, we see SGPC/ DSGMC being given contracts to “renovate” or “modernize” Gurdwaras in Pakistan. This is very sad. The same body which eroded the Sikh heritage in India is being allowed to have contracts in Pakistan and do similar work there. It is highly likely that SGPC and their associates will destroy and deface the original traditional look of our Gurdwaras.

There are organizations and individuals having knowledge of Sikh heritage. These bodies have thousands and thousands of hours gone in the research of original Sikh heritage. They are neither consulted nor informed in any of these “projects”.

We urge the government of Pakistan to engage in positive intervention and in the larger interest of the world wide Sikh community, stop giving authorization to SGPC to engage in any kind of Gurdwara renovations and related.

Most Sikhs born in India or the global Sikh diaspora have not even seen Gurdwaras in Pakistan even one time in their life. When SGPC and related bodies change these Gurdwaras, the original look of these Gurdwara Sahibaans will be lost forever.

This amounts to injustice to the founders of the Sikh religion and the entire Sikh community.

As an alternative to this continuous heritage changing spree by SGPC/ DSGMC, we are ready to provide names of individuals and organizations who would sincerely look after this and provide the Sikh community and it’s heritage with proper justice. Kindly help us preserve the legacy of the Sikh Gurus!

Kindly do not hesitate to contact the undersigned for anything related to this letter.

Best Regards

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Our heritage and ideals, our code and standards - the things we live by and teach our children - are preserved or diminished by how freely we exchange ideas and feelings.

Mr Walt Disney